

VETERINARIANS' RESPONSIBILITY IN REPORTING RABIES CASES IN ILLINOIS

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It is well known that rabies is a fatal disease and the quick-response administration of rabies preventive treatment (rabies post exposure prophylaxis or rabies PEP) for the exposed individual is necessary unless the high-risk exposing animal tests negative. Public health departments can ensure the exposed person is recommended to receive rabies PEP if the bat or other high-risk animal cannot be tested quickly.

When a Bat is Discovered in the Home

If a client reports a bat in the home, the bat should not be released until the local public health department or animal control is called to determine if the bat needs testing due to either pet or human exposure. There are multiple videos online demonstrating the safe capturing of a bat:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhnV5WJQBA>

And directions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on how to capture a bat and to keep them out of the home:

<https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/animals/bats/index.html#capture>

It is best to test the bat rather than needing to refer the person for rabies PEP (rabies immune globulin, or RIG, and four doses of vaccine over 14 days).

Proper Reporting

Big brown bats are the most common species testing positive for rabies in Illinois. Since this bat is colonial and prefers to live in man-made structures such as homes, both humans and pets can be exposed to these bats when an invasion occurs. Public health personnel who learn of a rabid bat exposure will advise the person to take their pet to their veterinarian.

When pets are exposed to a bat in this type of situation, the local animal control department should be notified. Veterinarians may encounter the following situations involving rabies that should result in reporting an exposure to the local public health department.

- A client who brings in a bat and reports that their pet was exposed to the bat. In these situations, it is also possible that people in the house may have been exposed. The following conditions on bat exposures would result in a recommendation for rabies PEP unless the bat can be quickly tested negative for the disease:
 - A bite from a bat.
 - Bare skin contact with a bat.
 - The person woke from sleep to a bat in the room.



- Someone who is not able to say what their interaction with a bat was, that could include small children, persons with dementia or persons who are impaired living in the household.
- A client who reports any bites from a high-risk species (neurologic animal, bat, coyote, fox, raccoon, skunk) that can't be quickly tested as negative.

Mandated Reporting to Public Health Agencies

Veterinarians may not be aware that they are mandated to report to public health authorities per the Control of Communicable Diseases Code, 690.200. Veterinarians may become aware of situations that have public health implications, and public health agencies rely on them to report these incidents so the risk to the public can be reduced. The cooperation from veterinary professionals is greatly appreciated as public health agencies work to avoid any human or pet rabies cases in Illinois.

The local health departments in the state can be found at:
<https://dph.illinois.gov/about/lhd.html>

Required Testing

In addition, the Illinois Animal Control Act requires reporting veterinarians to test if the animal dies during a 10 day hold for observation (see highlighted section):

Section 30.120 Biting Animal Considered Officially Vaccinated; Brains of Dogs Suspected of Having Rabies and Which Have Died Shall Be Submitted for Examination

a) A biting animal shall, for confinement purposes as set forth in Section 13 of the Act, be considered officially vaccinated against rabies if:

1. The initial rabies vaccination was completed at least 30 days prior to the biting incident, or
2. The biting animal shall have been previously immunized against rabies and the biting incident occurred within the recognized immunization period for the vaccine used.

b) The brains of all dogs or other animals which are suspected of having rabies or the brains from animals which have bitten a person or other animal and die during the period of observation shall be promptly and properly submitted to a recognized laboratory for rabies examination. It shall be the responsibility of the person who has the biting animal confined under his or her observation to see that the brain is properly submitted to the laboratory without delay. There is no observation period for high-risk wild animals so their brains shall be submitted immediately for rabies examination after a bite.

(Source: Amended at 7 Ill. Reg. 1712, effective January 28, 1983)

Dogs and cats that are euthanized rather than tested before the 10 days after a bite should be sent to the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine's Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory rather than to a public health lab. Here is a link to the rabies laboratory submission form:

<https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idph/files/forms/ohp-labs-rabies-submission-form-revised-10082019.pdf>

For special circumstances, contact your local health department for assistance.

It is also important to note that rabies in dogs and cats is extremely rare in Illinois. The following link under resources has the last rabid dog or cat in each Illinois county since 1964 in the table format:

<https://dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/rabies/surveillance-map-archive/last-rabid-cat-by-county.html>).

This information can help individuals bitten by dogs or cats to understand that the animal in question that has bitten someone can be monitored for 10 days rather than the person needing to get rabies PEP.

Rabies Pre-exposure Vaccination

The rabies pre-exposure series for persons who work with the rabies virus, individuals who are frequently exposed to animals, and for certain travelers is now only two doses of rabies vaccine on day 0 and 7. These recommendations are at the following link:

https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/prevention/pre-exposure_vaccinations.html .

Consider if pre-exposure rabies vaccination is necessary for your staff, especially ones who will be handling fractious animals or more high-risk creatures, such as those with neurologic disease. In addition, know that some Illinois pharmacy chains provide rabies vaccine.